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DEPT FOR SCA/INSB AND DRL

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SUBJECT: MINISTER'S COMMENTS ON EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS  
PROVOKE CONCERN AMONG HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS

Classified By: CDA Nicholas Dean. Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D)

Summary

1. (C) Human Rights Groups and supporters reacted strongly after Bangladesh's Shipping Minister sought to defend extrajudicial killings while a panelist on a BBC produced talk show that aired October 4. Local human rights groups demanded clarification of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) position on extrajudicial killings. Embassy officers raised the comments and stressed the importance of human rights and security force accountability with the Prime Minister's top adviser and other senior GOB officials. GOB interlocutors reiterated the GOB did not/not support extrajudicial killings and remained committed to ending abuses and professionalizing law enforcement agencies. The Minister's comments illustrated ongoing difficulties the GOB leadership has with regard to message discipline. End Summary.

Minister Comments on Extrajudicial Killings

2. (U) Local press headlined Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan's statements defending extrajudicial killings during the October 4 edition of the BBC's Bangladesh Sanglap, a talk show dedicated to discussing Bangladesh issues. Speaking as a panelist, Khan said no government wanted crossfires, the term used in Bangladesh to indicate possible extrajudicial killings, during its tenure, but they were a reality in Bangladesh. He expanded his comments saying, "We talk about human rights whenever a criminal is killed in a crossfire, but what about the human rights of those who are killed by criminals?" Khan also claimed Bangladeshis were afraid to file complaints against criminals because the country's legal system did not favor victims. His comments drew immediate demands from local human rights organizations for the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) to clarify its stance regarding extrajudicial killings.

GOB Clarifies Position

3. (C) PolCouns expressed U.S. concerns about recent statements by senior officials that appeared to condone crossfires with the Prime Minister's Security Advisor Tarique Siddique. PolCouns noted that such statements contradicted the Prime Minister's assurances that the GOB would seek to enhance security force accountability. Siddique reiterated the GOB's commitment to ending abuses and professionalizing law enforcement agencies. He said the Prime Minister had repeatedly instructed Ministers not to speak on issues outside their areas of authority. Poloff reiterated USG concerns to Joint Secretary for Home Affairs (Political) Kamal Uddin Ahmed. Ahmed stressed the GOB did not support extrajudicial killings and reiterated that the Shipping

Minister's comments did not/not reflect GOB policies or positions.

Comment

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14. (C) The Shipping Minister's comments run counter to previous GOB statements and actions on extrajudicial killings. His statements on a topic clearly outside his bailiwick represent a lack of message discipline that top GOB leaders are struggling to maintain. We will continue pressing the GOB to implement further reforms and increase transparency in its investigations of alleged extrajudicial killings. Other donors have also expressed concern about these statements, and the topic is likely to figure prominently in an ongoing visit by a group of EU human rights Ambassadors.

DEAN